

Service Transcript

Sunday 14th August 2022

Welcome, notices and birthday box

FRONTLINE SUNDAYS & TOGETHER WE GROW

MATTHEW VERSES

We were reminded last week how we are the light of the world and that we let our light shine before others, that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. As we scatter to our personal frontlines this week, we are taking the light of Christ. We are the light of the world because Jesus is the light of the world and His light shines in us through us. Let's stand and say this responsive declaration together.

DECLARATION

We have needed the light of Christ

As it shines through our darkest moments.

We have seen the light of God

As it illuminates the joys and blessings in our lives.

We have felt the light of the Spirit

As it moves and guides us on our path.

1419 Light of the world

GATHERED AND SCATTERED

In our previous sessions on Frontline Sundays I talked about how as church, we spend the majority of our time scattered in our community, families, jobs, social circles and the like – all places (frontlines) where we meet those who do not share our Christian faith. FRONTLINES DEFINITION Our lives are part of the mission that Jesus has for us to go and make disciples. That's just a fact of who we are: we meet people of all kinds in our daily lives and we are ambassadors for Christ in all our frontlines; whether we care to recognise it or not. That's us and as God's people we need to equip ourselves to honour Him wherever we find ourselves and that's what we've been seeking to do in the previous weeks.

GATHERED AND SCATTERED

That makes the brief times we are gathered together as God's gathered people - in church or in home groups or whatever – even more important. To live as God's people amongst all the challenges the world throws at us we of course need the presence and power of God's Spirit in our lives, and we also need one another. That is God's will and way – to be gathered church to empower us to then be scattered church. What we do as church as we come to worship, pray, study God's word will equip us into how we live out our faith in our everyday lives.

VIDEO

When we are scattered, we are promised the presence of God. And He's given us the support of one another as we go to our frontlines. And we find strength and encouragement from our God and one another as we meet together and worship. So let's give God praise now.

1404 King of Kings, majesty

Prayers

There are times when we come across those that say 'I DON'T NEED TO GO TO CHURCH TO BE A CHRISTIAN'. Technically, yes as we proved during the pandemic. But God has made us part of a body – the body of Christ, the Church. Can we REALLY say that we don't need to go to church or be part of a church, or to have fellowship with other believers, when God's will for His people is being part of a church fellowship? Fellowship was what in my experience was the most missed part of Lockdown. God made us a social species and we grow and thrive as people and particularly as God's people because we have one another. That is what today is all about. During most of the week we find ourselves scattered, sometimes disconnected and alone from other believers. I'm sure you, like me draw strength from worshipping together as a church and meeting with one another in different contexts. It draws us closer to God and we are able to encourage one another.

What happens if we are isolated and under pressure from those who don't know Christ? We considered that last time in Frontline Sundays and here we have it again now in this video from OPEN DOORS. In countries where persecution is common, believers can be scattered and isolated and then suffer at the hands of people who attack them just because they are Christians. Here's a recent story from India.

VIDEO

Never think you don't need church. I don't think Mehr ever thought she didn't need the support of other believers. She wasn't isolated out of choice, but we praise God, that as she was considering ending her life, God brought other Christians into her life and rescued her.

UKRAINE NOTICE

Sometimes the support of the believers really tells when disaster strikes as we have found with the Ukraine Crisis. The love and support of other believers has literally been a life-saver for many Ukrainian Christians. Do join the Zoom Meeting tomorrow to pray for Ukrainian Christians who have found refuge here in Felixstowe.

So let's pray for Christians like Mehr and others like her and maybe also for those Christians we know who don't think church is important, that they may not find out the hard way that it is God's way by which we grow and thrive as his people and equipped to go to our frontline places where we may be the only Christian. Let's give thanks too for all the positive stories of how important being part of church is in equipping us for our daily lives

PRAYER

Father,

Please save us from thinking that we don't need church and challenge again those we know who walked away from church thinking that they can grow as Your people without it.

We thank you for Mehr and the countless number of Christians in India who face opposition and violent persecution in India today. We pray for her healing, and ask that other Christians wouldn't face the same persecution and discrimination. We pray that they may have faith in God and be undeterred, remember God in all suffering and happiness, and live the Word and remain in God. We pray too that Christians in India would receive courage and strength to resist the pressure to leave Jesus, and would know the great value of faithfully following God.

We pray for protection for church leaders and their families, and for courage to share God's Word despite the risks and pray for those like Mehr who have been falsely accused of paying people to become Christians, that their names will be cleared.

We also pray that those who oppose the growth of Christianity will encounter Jesus through the witness of His church, and turn to Him. We pray that the laws will be repealed or a deterrent put in place to prevent false accusations. Lastly we pray that God will strengthen and protect Open Doors partners, who take great risks to come alongside those most in need.

Coming to Ukraine, we pray Lord that the governments of Ukraine and Russia may head towards a just and peaceful conclusion to the war. Thank you for the way in which you have brought Ukrainians into our community Felixstowe and for the positive welcome they have experienced.

We bring all these things to You
In Jesus' name.

Amen.

1561 This is my desire

Prayer for MRBC – from sheet.

Time of personal prayer for those needing the presence of God in their lives.

Let's close be praying for ourselves, that we may keep Jesus as the centre of our lives and the centre of this church as we sing our next song.

1377 Jesus, be the centre

Reading

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Sermon

GATHERED AND SCATTERED

So we are scattered as the church during most of our days, but we have these times of gathering when we gain encouragement and strength from one another.

DON'T NEED THE CHURCH?

The idea of not needing church as a Christian is of course not a scriptural one, but the writer to the Hebrews did encounter many Hebrew Christians who through persecution and difficulties, felt like giving up. So what does he encourage us to do as we gather in God's presence as church? Here it is in VERSE 23: *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

He encourages them to hold on to the hope that God has given them as they look at the many things that may pressurise them to grow cold in their faith or even tempt them to give up. As disciples of Christ, these are words of encouragement too.

In some ways it is comforting to know that we are not the first people to have ever suffered discouragement in our lives as Christians! We are part of a 2000 year line!

This is a sermon called TOGETHER WE GROW, because as believers and as church we grow through our fellowship together, particularly as a worshipping, praying and serving community under the headship of Christ. So to start with in our passage the writer to the Hebrews, writing to churches as much as individuals gives us some encouragement that we can remind one another of.

First of all

HEADING 1

- **He urges us to draw near to God.**

VERSE

In verse 19 we are told this: *therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body..*

In the OT tabernacle and temple, only the High Priest was permitted into the Most Holy Place and that was only with the blood of sacrifices for himself and the sins of the nations. No-one else was allowed. Through the death and shed blood of Jesus, we are allowed to enter into the presence of God, anywhere and everywhere and talk with Him. That's amazing, that's a privilege. Let's grab on to that one as we worship and encourage one another to pray, but also as we scatter, so that wherever we are as individuals, we can enter into God's presence through prayer.

HEADING 2 Secondly,...

- **We have complete assurance of our faith**

VERSE

... by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart .. etc.

Sometimes we all need someone, whether that be a carer, an assistant, a secretary, a marriage partner, an expert, someone more confident or eloquent as we face problems and issues of life don't we. We enter into the presence of God as we are because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It's great that we can, but with our lifestyle and attitudes, to many it seems daunting. How can I be in God's presence, even enter in with boldness? We don't, we lean on One who is more expert more eloquent, more worthy than us - Jesus our Great High Priest. He speaks for us, He represents us; so we know we can pray and act boldly before God and draw near to God.

Now we've kind of covered the issue of assurances last time, but what's added here is the fact that when we meet together, worship together, pray together, serve together; we are strengthened by one another and by the presence of God moving amongst us. Church, when it works according to God's will and way, can and should build up our assurance and therefore our confidence to walk with God in the darkest and most difficult of frontlines.

HEADING 3 Thirdly ...

- **We experience peace**

VERSE

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

I mentioned earlier that we are fit to enter into God's presence because of the shed blood of Jesus, even though there is so much of our past and present lives is characterised by sin. We enter because God Himself dealt with our sin in the death of Jesus on the cross, but the other way He deals with it is cleansing us from the guilty conscience brought on by past sin: can I really be forgiven for THAT? Yes, the blood of Jesus is sufficient for the forgiveness of our sins! All of them! We then get a second picture of having our bodies washed. Jews believed one must be ritually clean before worship and prayer. They had all sorts of cleaning rituals. In Christ, God has cleaned us up so we are fit for His presence. Never think that God can't use you or that God can't use us as a church. In Christ, we are ready and worthy to be in the presence of God and be commissioned to do His work. We are cleansed from day 1 of following Jesus, so no believer is excepted. That's why we signify that in our initiation rite – baptism.

God has made us fit as church whether gathered or scattered to be in His presence and for His presence to go with us. I suggested earlier that we have frontlines – places and situations where we come into contact with those who don't know Jesus. That's the reality of being a Christian. Now that freaks some out but know this – you take God's presence with you because you are worthy to do that. It's a fact that should give you confidence and assurance – and it's our jib as church to remind one another of that and encourage one another.

The writer to the Hebrews says we should build one another up so that we grow in Christ and can effectively reflect Jesus at our frontlines.

We spur one another to good works

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds

We firstly spur one another to good works. 'Spur' is a strong word. In some translations the word "provoke" is used. It has the idea of 'inciting' one another. We often use these words in a negative way and this seems strange particularly when linked with 'love and good works'! But you can incite people to do good stuff too. It's a strong word. I'm here to incite you. Not to hate, but to love, not to kill or injure, but to do stuff that benefits others. The idea is by what we say and do, we leave our gatherings as people determined to act on our frontlines with love and good works. Its strength stresses the importance of helping one another to live our faith on our frontlines.

It's important as we can grow weary of doing good. People can be ungrateful or even manipulative of what we try to do to help them. Our best efforts may not seem to lead to lasting change. It's easy to give up, to become self-centred.

The writer to the Hebrews recognised that we can help one another by not allowing each other to give up. To keep the challenge before us. To keep going.

So our challenge this week is to ask how that should look in our church life together moving forward? How do we already help one another be attentive to his purposes through each person

on their frontline? How could we help one another more? What do we learn together that might help you when we're apart? That's our challenge today!

Keep meeting together

I said earlier that there are many who have abandoned church because they don't see the point. There are even more that see church as part of their life that they can pick and drop. Our frontlines are important as we come into contact with people who don't know Jesus. We do the work of God in being salt and light to them as we said last week.

But to do this, our life together, gathered as church is vital for that. If this is the place where we are reminded of the core elements of our faith, and if this is the community that will help us remain faithful to our calling, if this is the community that will affirm the significance of where we are Monday through Saturday, then meeting together is vital. It's not an optional extra, it's essential to our spiritual growth and our effectiveness as we are scattered to our frontlines.

The gathered worship life of our church is where we teach, guide, challenge, equip, encourage, love, and commission one another for our lives on the frontline. Never underestimate how important church is – it's God's appointed place for us. We are the body of Christ. His kingdom is being built through gathered church fellowships like this one. People come to Christ more often than not in our scattered places, but it is within our gathered places that all believers grow, because it is together we know. Let's give God glory as we say this prayer together.

PRAYER We thank you, Heavenly Father, for the gift of this community. We commend one another to you on our different frontlines.	PRAYER <small>continued</small> Wherever we are, whatever we do, whoever we are, may the Holy Spirit guide us in all things so that we may do God's will in the world, in the service of Jesus Christ and with great joy. Amen.
<small>licc. Frontline Sundays</small>	<small>licc. Frontline Sundays</small>

Here is a relevant song from the Rend Collective.

Video: Build Your kingdom here – Rend Collective

Commissioning for our Frontlines

You've listened to 5 weeks worth of Sermons. We all have these frontline places: ***Frontlines are the everyday places where we live, work, study, or play and where we're likely to connect with people who aren't Christians.***

They are there whether we like it or not – and God calls us to engage those who don't know Jesus – yet. If you have been challenged by this series, then please respond with me in this following commissioning for our frontlines. We all say the words in italics.

RED STONE

We come to our final freebie. We have just had this commissioning and I hope you feel strengthened to go back to your frontlines, charged and eager to reflect Jesus in your words and actions. Stones are shaped by the elements as we know, having a beach full of shingle a few minutes away! Can I suggest you take and keep a glass pebble somewhere where you can see it

and remind yourself to pray that God will shape you for and on your frontlines. May we thank God for His love and lift up others in the fellowship and their frontlines for Together We Grow

OUR COMMITMENTS

As followers of Jesus Christ, will you embrace your frontlines as places of possibility and potential in the purposes of God? Will you believe that God is already at work in these places and will you give yourself unreservedly to his purposes in you and through you, wherever you are?

Response: With the help of God, we will.

licc. Frontline Sundays

OUR COMMITMENTS

Will you trust God with the big things and the small things that you do day by day, and seek to make all that you do on your frontlines a part of your worship of him? Will you learn to rely on him, his power, his love, and his grace, whatever you do?

Response: With the help of God, we will.

licc. Frontline Sundays

OUR COMMITMENTS

As sons and daughters of your heavenly Father, will you believe that your value, your worth, your significance, and your life on the frontline flow first from this identity? Will you embrace the joy and freedom of being a child of God, whoever you are?

Response: With the help of God, we will.

licc. Frontline Sundays

OUR COMMITMENTS

As the body of Christ, will you commit to encouraging and helping one another flourish in Christ and be fruitful on your frontlines? Will you learn to be the people of God gathered and scattered, helping one another to make all the difference in the world?

Response: With the help of God, we will.

COMMISSIONING PRAYER

We affirm your call to follow Christ in all of life, including life on your frontline. We commission you to this life and work, and pledge to you our prayers, encouragement, and support.

licc. Frontline Sundays

May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you; that in this and in all things you will know Christ and seek to make him known, to the glory of God the Father.

Response: We rejoice in being followers of Jesus, sent from this church into God's world for his purposes.

May the blessing of God go with you.

licc. Frontline Sundays

Blessing

2465 Now may the peace of the Lord

For Reflection & Discussion

Sermon reminder

The sermon reminded us that we, as churches, help each other hold on to hope together by focusing on God, spurring one another to good works, and meeting together consistently. By drawing near to God, focusing on Jesus, we are renewed as we remind one another of our baptism vows – ‘our bodies being washed with pure water.’ We also spur one another to good works. The word that translates as ‘spur’ or ‘incite’ or ‘provoke’ is a strange word to link with ‘love and good works’ but its strength suggests the importance of helping one another live our faith on our frontlines. The writer to the Hebrews recognised that we can help one another by not allowing each other to give up – to keep the challenge before us and keep going. Our scattered and gathered lives are irrevocably connected. Together we remind one another of the core of our faith and its implications for the whole of life. Gathered church is where we are taught, guided, changed, challenged, equipped, encouraged, loved, and commissioned. Then our discipleship is lived out in our scattered frontline contexts.

1. The early church to whom Hebrews was written seem to have been tempted to stop meeting. Maybe their previous way of life seemed attractive again, maybe being out of step with society was getting difficult, or maybe they were just busy. When have you been tempted to give up on meeting together? What has kept you going? What is the best thing about gathering as Christians?
- 2 Take time to reflect on the Frontline Sundays series as a whole. What have you learnt about yourself? What have you learnt about one another? What have you been reminded of about God?
- 3 What has become clearer about the relationship between the gathered and scattered life of your church? What is more challenging now?
- 4 What stories have you shared with one another that have most encouraged you? Explore how you can continue encouraging one another.
- 5 Hebrews 10:24 encourages us to ‘to spur one another toward love and good deeds’. How could your Sunday gatherings keep linking with your Monday to Saturday lives?
- 6 What can you do as a group to ensure that you keep encouraging one another to be fruitful in your everyday lives?
- 7 What’s the one thing you don’t want to lose from this series?